

Corner Bar Magazine

Volume 1 Number 3

Page 1 – ARABESQUE by Edward Ahern. He writes, “Born 1942 in Chicago. Graduated from the University of Illinois in 1965 with a degree in journalism. Went through Naval officer candidate, scuba diving and bomb disarming schools and served as officer of the deck, diving and EOD officer aboard the aircraft carrier Essex. Married Elizabeth in November of 1967, and went to work as a reporter for the Providence Journal. After a year on the Journal went through a year of intelligence trade craft and language training and spent four years in Germany and three in Japan. Speak decent German and French and bad Japanese. With the demise of that organization went to work in international sales for Abitibi, a Canadian-American paper producer. Picked up an MBA from NYU (honors), and stayed twenty three years with Abitibi, serving as product development, international sales, and marketing director. Visited 72 countries for Abitibi over the years. Retired from Abitibi at fifty eight and went to work for International Forest Products, a subsidiary of the Kraft family group of companies that includes the New England Patriots. Really retired in 2010 and started writing fiction and poetry. Over a hundred twenty stories, poems and articles published so far, and two books.

Page 7 – SONNY SAVES by David Caprita, who writes “I live in Los Angeles as a writer/actor/DJ. You can read more of that part of my life at davidcaprita.com, which attaches to my IMDB info. I'm originally from Pensacola, Florida, which is basically South Alabama, where my boyhood friends were either kids whose families' roots went back for centuries or Navy brats like me whose families had travelled the world and ended up in the backwoods of little towns like Bagdad, Chumuckla, Two Egg. So, growing up in the sixties in the Deep South surrounded by the civil rights struggles, the Vietnam War and the rock and soul music scene colored my view of the world.”

Page 11 – THE FORECAST FOR TONIGHT by David Caprita.



ARABESQUE

by EDWARD AHERN

Gus retreated into meditation after a bad day of work and another argument with Cynthia. He ignored the leg cramps his lotus position caused, and cleared his mind of everything except his focal point, a Philips head screw. He exterminated feeling and thought but couldn't reach a higher state. Frustration began to chew on his tranquility.

Maybe if I think myself forward in space or time? Or maybe if I visualize myself high above my body, looking down? But as soon as he tried for a spiritual destination his tranquility ruffled like windblown water.

I need a nonsense thought to restore my oblivion. And from nowhere came a memory of a dance step he'd always thought of as hinky - feet close together, then swing the toes forty five degrees to the side and bring the heels up behind them, while slightly wagging his backside.

Still kneeling in his lotus position, Gus visualized himself syncopating sideways. Toes and heels, toes and heels, nowhere to go but sideways. Toes and heels...

And slipped through a crease in the world. Gus snapped into full consciousness, but his body was nowhere to be seen. And that was weird, because he had no eyes. Literally senseless, he somehow knew that he now looked like a slivered sheet of mica. What the hell is going on? Where am I, no really, where's my body? As he peered

around colors blurred and reshaded in a quickly turning prism. Panic gurgled up in him like bad-food vomit.

Get a grip, chubby. What can I see? No, not see, sense? What am I aware of?

He was vertical in a horizontal sea flood of other mica sheets, blurred multi colors that poured past and over him. The sheets emanated annoyance at his obstruction.

"Hey, you!"

"You can talk!"

"Don't be an idiot. All you know is sound so that's what you think you're hearing. You're a pudgy little sucker. Turn sideways before you cause a serious inconvenience."

"I don't know how."

"Everybody does. It's like teat sucking, comes naturally. Wait - you're not dead!"

"Huh?"

"Dead, dummy. Your colors are camel dung drab. You're not supposed to be here."

The mica sheets flowed more densely and their push made Gus start to teeter.

"You've got to turn sideways and get up to group speed or you'll cause us to sprawl. You really don't want that to happen."

"Why does it matter? And I still don't know how."

"The group's corrective action would be to skewer you with what feels like thousands of acid tipped fish hooks. An obstinate dead person can tolerate it, barely. It would drive

you mad. You have to turn and swim. Remember being on a swing and swinging so high that you almost were able to circle the bar, but starting to dead drop? That's the feeling. Do it now!"

Gus remembered the sensation with vivid fear and snapped into horizontal. He began slowly gliding in the direction of the flow, feeling the almost bumps of the mica sheets as they overtook him.

"Kick it in the ass. Visualize yourself as sprinting."

Gus lurched, too fast, then too slow, but eventually matched the endless flow of sparkling mica.

"Are you still there?"

"For now. How did you manage to get here while alive?"

"Don't know, I was meditating and started sidling to the left when - pop- here I am." Gus paused. "Are all these sparkling sheets souls? Is this heaven?"

The other voice sighed. "Where to begin? It'd be so much easier if you'd died. Everybody comes here, good, bad and indif-

ferent."

"How do you know the good ones from the bad?"

The mica-like horde swerved in seamless joy, like a huge school of bait fish. Gus lurched and caused thousands of annoyances before getting back on pace.

"We're all amalgams of good and bad, but the bonding agent is the same. Once we're here we can look at one another and know what sort of blend we were."

"Do the bad stay bad?"

"No. Most quickly lose their pretenses. It's kind of like lying about your physique at a nudist colony, everybody here eventually buffs up. The pathologically bad are fish hooked until they follow acceptable behavior. But what the hell are we going to do with you? You're the unchangeable color of dirt. You can't survive here."

Gus had a thought that almost caused him to lose his cruising tempo. "Could I meet my parents?"

"I told you everybody comes here. Everybody. From the beginning of human



history to now. Trillions upon trillions, that's why we're crowded up in a space without perceived limits."

Gus became aware of his own hues. Sweet Jesus, all those moldy, blotchy bits. I need to cover myself with a huge fig leaf. "What about God, and Jesus, and the saints? And hell?"

"Dunno. We don't eat, drink or screw. No measured time. No clothes or possessions. No social status. All we have is membership. Once the other stuff dropped away we lost our need for a catechism. We're coming to a cascade. Touch the tip of your sheet to mine, I'll guide you through."

Oh my God, I'm undulating like a hula dancer. Free fall, vertigo, oh, the sinuous motions stroke my facets. I'm bursting with light.

"That was incredible! My mind feels like a honed knife."

"Pretty good. Being here is like riding a series of roller coasters without getting sick. Some are incredibly fast, some drop uncontrollably, some whip you in facet shaving turns. And after each cascade we're more sharply colored.

"All right, Gus, we've decided you have to go back."

"Wait! I just got here, how could you have decided that, or decided anything at all if you're just a swarm of souls or a school of holy fish?"

Gus sensed something sigh like, "Remember there's no measured time here. And we exist in consensus. Like the hymn says, 'We are all one spirit.' Or maybe 'We've got rhythm.' Anyway, no fault of yours, but

you're a fart in our perfume factory. We're going to be swirling left here."

Gus felt lost and supremely well guided at the same time. "Who are you that you're the one to help me? Why isn't it a committee?"

"Any one is many here. I'm your guide back to the physical. We have hopes that you'll do something for your brethren when you get back."

"Like what?"

"We have some suggestions that we'd like you to publicize."

"No one will believe me."

"We think we've worked that out. You've heard about secrets going to the grave? Guess what, they're all filed away here."

"Like how JFK was really assassinated?"

"Nah. We know, of course, but that's an unverifiable truth that would only cause more arguments. What we're going to tell you is mostly where things are hidden. Sunken ships, written confessions, lost cities, buried treasure. If you succumb to greed you'll become a very wealthy man. But then you'd look even more like crap when you get back here."

"So you want me to discover these things?"

"You need to be flushed through a few more cascades. No, dummy, you'll use these hidden items to establish your credibility about our suggestions. You'll dangle a goodie in front of thousands of people and make them listen to our hints before you give them the location."

"Why aren't they commandments, like Moses?"

"Yeah, that worked really well. Hang on;

this next one is going to knock off some of your moldy bits.”

The immense school glided into a raging froth of something. It’s like swimming through tonic water, no, like a scalding hot spring that stripping off my skin, no, swimming through aloe vera with bubbles of rose attar.

“I, I’ve never felt this clean!”

“Yeah, better maybe, but you still look pretty scummy. So here’s our list of suggestions:”

1. Get used to crowds, you’ll be a permanent member soon enough.
2. The dead already mourn the acts of the living, the living needn’t bother to mourn the dead.
3. Sex really is overrated.
4. Inflicting pain is self-cauterizing.
5. Eat and drink well, it’s your only chance, but...
6. ...anything done to excess is self-defeating.

“That’s it? What about messages from you all to your children and grandchildren, expressions of love, warnings....”

“We don’t interfere in your playground games, Gus. We’re going to give you a memory dump now. It’s going to feel like belly bloating.”

Gus’ dung-shaded but somewhat sparkly sheet suddenly felt like the mica flecks would pop off, like an overcharged bottle of pop.

“God, this is worse than my colonoscopy!”

“It’ll diffuse. We’ve also told you how you should return- basically just a reversal of the

arabesque, sidling to the right rather than the left. Think as if you had feet.”

“Wait, will I remember my experiences here?”

“Of course. They’re yours, we wouldn’t take them away.”

“And will I remember you. I don’t even know your name.”

Gus sensed a smile. “Think of me...think of me as your father, some part of me was. And know that as the living go, you’re a decent piece of work. Now get those missing feet shuffling.”

Gus syncopated to the right, still aligned with the school. Toes and heels, toes and heels, heels, toes, sideways...

And was back in his lotus position, visualizing his Phillips head screw. A raging memory torrent poured through his head, but after several minutes he was able to channel the flow within the limits of his understanding. He felt fresh-from-the-womb clean, immaculately reborn.

Once his legs quit tingling Gus checked his phone messages, tweets and e mails. He’d been out of action for two days and had been officially warned that his extended job absence was unacceptable and grounds for dismissal. Cynthia had left twenty seven messages, the last of which was that she needed space to rethink their relationship. I’ll miss Cynthia, but I don’t think I’m going to need that job. Guess I really should do what they asked. Got no money, have to start this small.

Gus drove his eight year old car to an abandoned apartment building. He pushed aside the corrugated sheeting that partly

blocked the doorway and entered, then walked carefully up to the fifth floor. The door to apartment 523 had been removed, probably for firewood. Two badly stained mattresses lay on the floor, and glassine packets were strewn everywhere. Used to be a shooting gallery I guess.

Gus pulled out the ball peen hammer he'd brought with him and began smashing through the plaster. On the floor behind the wall was a large, towel-wrapped bundle. He crouched down, grabbed the bundle, brushed off the rat droppings, and left without opening it.

Once back at his apartment he lay a plastic sheet on the bed, set the bundle on the sheet, and opened it. Holy hell. One, no two really long strands of pearls. The stones I think are what they call rose cut. Big, so big I'd choke if I tried to swallow them. Emeralds, I think, and rubies, and diamonds, must be hundreds of big diamonds. All set in heavy gold. Holy hell.

He arranged the jewelry on the sheet and took several pictures with his phone. Then he called the Providence Journal. "Editorial please"

"Copy desk, Harrington."

"Mr. Harrington I'd like to send you a picture of the Weatheral jewelry that was stolen in the 1920's from what was then the Biltmore hotel. Once you verify that the pieces are the same I'd like you to send over your TV station crew."

"Ah, and who are you?"

"Gus gave his name, address and phone number, and got the phone number of the reporter. The reporter had the pictures with-

in seconds and within fifteen minutes had called back.

"Mr. Gustausen, Jim Harrington. The pictures seem to jibe with the list of the stolen items. I repeat, stolen. Have you called the police?"

"As soon as you show up with the camera crew. I want a reliable witness to their recovery of the stones."

"Thirty minutes."

Gus called the cops as soon as he saw the TV truck pull up in front of the building. The two officers were on camera with Gus when he showed them the gems. Gus seemed to almost glow on the televised report, like a total body halo. People began to forward the news report just so friends could see Gus.. He didn't mention the suggestions, it wasn't time yet.

Gus was interrogated for a week on and off, but since he hadn't been born when the gems were stolen he was concluded to be the finder of the cache and not the perpetrating felon. The insurance company was expected to pay him ten percent, something just south of one million dollars.

A week after the Weatheral stones hit the news Gus went back to work. This time he called the FBI. "FBI? Agent Williams, this is Gus Gustausen. You may have read about my recovery of the Weatheral treasure? Good. And this is being recorded? Better. I believe I know the location of the financial records for the DeStefano crime family in Worcester. And this time I think I want moral and armed support when I go to the location. Call me back once you verify who I am."

The DeStefano ledgers didn't make the news, nor make any money for him, but Gus had established his bona fides. Two weeks after the ledgers were confiscated he called the FBI again.

"Agent Tom Williams, please. Agent Williams? May I call you Tom? Tom, I can help solve one of the agency's biggest failures. But you have to agree to do something for me.

"No, no, nothing like that. I just want you to help publicize six brief suggestions. You can say that they come from me, and that the FBI has nothing to do with them, but I want you to hand them out at every press briefing about the event and me.

"Oh I think you'll be willing to do so. You missed by just fifteen feet. Pity. But I'll give you what's left of Jimmy Hoffa."

Gus hung up and smiled to himself. Once the suggestions hit the news it's time to dig up some Aztec gold. I'll take some of the money and have the suggestions put up on the big sign in Times Square. Get somebody to create a web site and ghost write a book about them. Maybe go on the Tonight show. He smiled to himself again. I'm doing all this when I'm still dubious about the suggestions. After all, I'm about to violate number three and find a new girlfriend. ❖

SONNY SAVES

BY DAVID CAPRITA

Sonny stares.

It's always been a joke among the rest of the guys in the band that Sonny's always staring out the side window of the car, even when he's driving. Looking at all the billboards and road signs like a toddler. Or a happy dog.

"I swear", Jim the guitarist would say, "if it weren't so cold, Sonny'd have the damn window down with his head sticking out and ears flapping."

Sonny smiles.

Sonny always looks at the trees, staring at the cows slowly munching behind barbed wire at the edge of the road. Watching them whizz by like telephone poles always makes him laugh.

"Sonny!" Sonny comes back to earth and looks at Rick sitting in the front passenger seat while Duck, the band's drummer drives. It's Duck's shift at the wheel. They don't let Sonny drive anymore. Not after what happened last summer.

"Sonny!" Rick hollers again without turning his head. There's your sign, buddy." Sonny searches the side of the road. Standing alone in the middle of a freshly harvested cotton field is a small, wooden

church with a sadly tilted steeple on the roof. At the edge of the highway, where a red dirt road leads to the lonely building, a white-washed board with the words "Jesus Saves" scrawled in black paint stands sentinel like a scarecrow.

Jesus saves what, Sonny always asks the other guys when he sees those signs, as common as NeHi Soda billboards in this Deep South countryside. It was a running joke. Jesus saves people? Jesus saves the world? Jesus saves time? Why just "Jesus Saves?"

And they were always ready with the punchline:

"Jesus keeps his money in the Chase Manhattan bank! Jesus keeps his money in the Chase Manhattan bank!"

Rick belts out the words in his rough Greg Allman tenor, the cigarette-stained voice that melts the hearts of all those small town southern girls who swoon to see a long hair in their local bar, just like the ones they see on TV. The rest of the band joins in:

"Jesus keeps his money in the Chase Manhattan Bank. Jesus saves, Jesus saves, Jesus saaaaaves!"

Duck, Rick and Jim, who's as usual next to Sonny in the back of the station wagon all chuckle.

"There's your song, Sonny."

"Yeah, right. My song." Sonny sounds

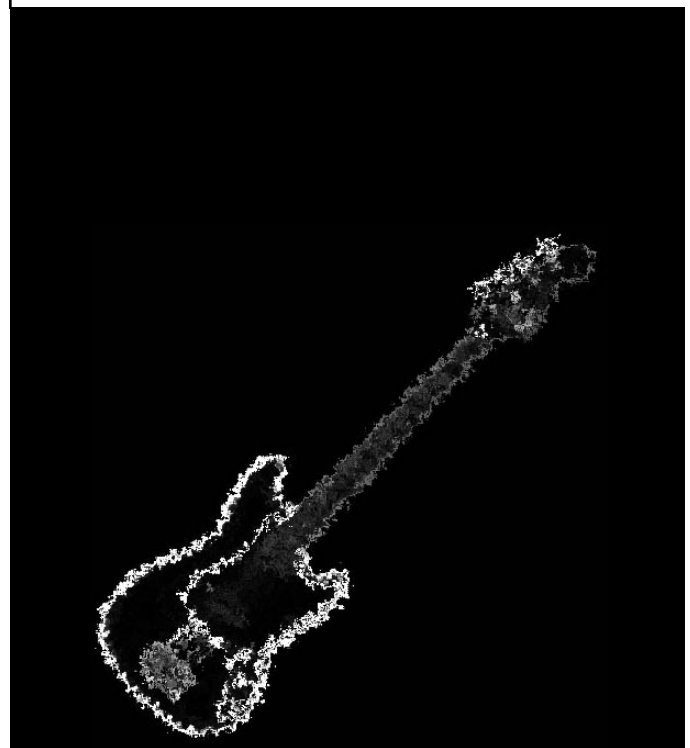
annoyed but he isn't. He's used to all the teasing and picking. He never takes it personal. It's a compliment. Being the goofy Ringo, the Falstaff Monkee of the band is a hell of a lot better than not being in the band at all. Sonny loves the attention. The Kords are and will forever be his family since his real one disappeared long ago. Sometimes Sonny feels as if he disappeared with them. Until he jumps into the band's beat up Chevy. Then he's with family again. They may not be the Stones but they might as well be to these podunk back towns spread across Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana. You'd think they were regulars on the Ed Sullivan show the way the kids react to them. The reaction from the crew-cutted rednecks is something different but that doesn't bother Sonny.

It takes hours to get to a gig on the two lane Alabama roads but they finally make it to the club. The Stoned Toad. The club is

out of place in the middle of all the churches and Crimson Tide signs but it's a hit among the rural crowd who starve for something more than - well, going to church and Alabama games.

Sonny carefully unpacks his weapon of the night - the Squier Classic Jazz four string bass. Definitely. He loved his other Fender but this one was perfect for the small room they'd be playing in, plucky but soft tone, maroon-on-white with the long neck. Sonny's ready to kill with his weapon du nuit.

The band played well that night. The crowd went wild during "Crossroads", the Cream version of course. Sonny played his heart out on the bass solo, a performance even Jack Bruce would have appreciated. They packed up their equipment five hours later, everyone in the band except Rick who, as usual, flirts with the fawning southern girls while their redneck boyfriends stare in



envy and hatred at the strangers in the long hair and girl pants. Two of the scrawniest hicks walk up to Jim and Duck while Sonny stands behind the open U Haul, making sure all the equipment is loaded properly. He always wished they would just leave it to him. Sonny's bigger than the other three Kords put together. He's the heavy lifter. So he doesn't mind. But by the time he got out to the back lot, it was done.

"You boys some kind of rock stars? You think you're Elvis or somethin'?" Jim and Duck stand silently. The hicks approach closer.

"It's bad enough you come to our town to play that shit here. We don't like you messing with our women."

Sonny looms out from behind the U Haul and plants himself behind Jim and Duck. The rednecks freeze and slink back into the bar. Jim and Duck try to keep from laughing. It's always the same: The rednecks want trouble, Sonny shows up and it's over before it started.

"Thanks, Sonny, you fat ol' sonfabitch," Jim laughs.

Sonny grins. Duck hollers at Rick to get his ass in the car. And Sonny crawls into his space in the back without a word.

Sonny's eyes are closed in exhaustion while the rest of the band's voices drone through the night, ignoring Sonny while he dozes. Once in a while he wakes when he hears his name, but they're talking about him, not to him, cracking up at his hilariously loud snoring, his creepy way he talks in his sleep, thinking he's passed out.

Sonny smiles. Their soft conversation

about tonight's performance and their dreams for the future of the Kords lulls him back to sleep.

Sonny wakes up with the sound of the station wagon downshifting and slowing down. He looks out the side window and watches a whitewashed sign pass by at a crawl, the crunch of gravel under the tires, the ominous shake of the U Haul full of equipment groaning onto the shoulder. The makeshift train stops.

Someone cuts the engine. Silence.

In the darkness, across a shaved cotton field full of bare branches with tufts of left-over cotton fiber, stands the lonely church they passed earlier in the dawn, its crooked steeple silhouetted against an almost full Alabama moon. Jesus Saves.

The guys open their doors and get out to stretch their legs, not asking Sonny if he wants to join them. He's not offended. Sonny's eyes remain closed as he overhears their words, their laughter, an occasional hiss as someone inhales a toke of a fat joint.

"Sonny! Thank you, man!"

"God bless you, Sonny, you sonofabitch."

Sonny smiles.

"Yep!"

They do love him. Sonny can't resist. Giggling, he opens the door to join the guys in the cold autumn Alabama air.

Sonny stands next to the car in the pitch black night. The voices have stopped. It's totally, solemnly silent. Then miles and an eternity away, the distant bark of a dog.

The band members' backs are to him. They ignore him as they stare down at their

feet, as if they're gazing into an open grave. Sonny walks next to Rick and stands in the darkness. A soft sob, as soft as one of the tufts of cotton hanging on the barbed wire in the darkness caresses the silence.

A cross, the kind they've zipped past countless times on the shoulders of those nameless Alabama two lane highways stands crooked in the grass like a tomato stake.

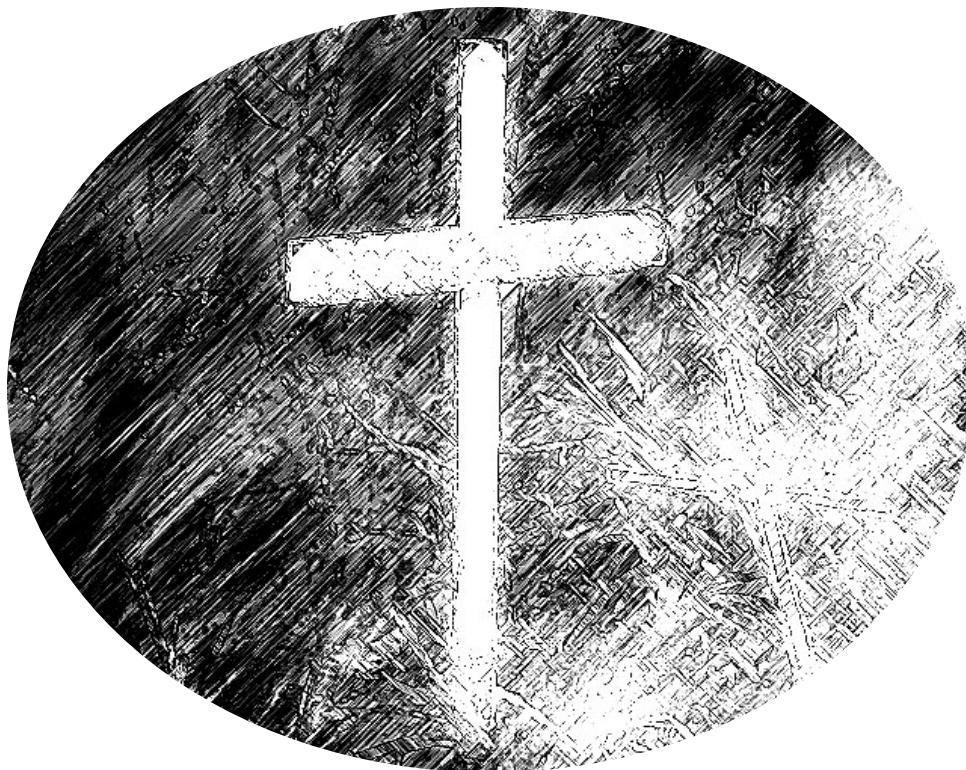
Duck crouches down and gently lays the half-smoked joint in front of it, its thread of smoke lifting into the air like incense. The cross's arm is festooned with scribbled notes

and faded snapshots taped and nailed to it, its base surrounded by plastic flowers faded into a ghostly pastel. A teddy bear grasps a toy guitar. It's not a Squier Classic Jazz four string but the sentiment is still there.

Sonny weeps.

A trembling voice softly pierces the silence. Rick's, Duck's, Jim's? Sonny can't tell, but it doesn't matter.

“Sonny saves, Sonny saves, Sonny saves.”



THE FORECAST FOR TONIGHT

BY DAVID CAPRITA

*On the anniversary of the death of a brother
October 24, 2012*

It was a dark and stormy night. Melvin stared out the bedroom window at the desperately waving trees, the sheets of rain driving diagonally down from the black, impenetrable ceiling of clouds hanging like ragged curtains.

To the rest of the world, it wasn't a dark and stormy night. It was anything but. It was a clear, crisp Florida autumn evening, one of those rare times of the year when the humidity was below twenty percent, allowing the air and the people in it to breathe in the brisk chill. Dew point was fifteen degrees below the air temperature. Which meant there wasn't enough moisture in the air to spit. All the stars were out, not just the bright Magnitude Ones and the planets that were always able to shine through the high altitude haze. Tonight the entire sky was a black blanket dusted with a talcum of stellar powder. Just the way the ceiling of the planetarium used to look when Daddy took them there.

To everyone else, including Chuck, Melvyn's

brother, it couldn't have been more pleasant. But through Melvyn's eyes it was the worst storms to hit the Florida panhandle since last fall. To Melvyn, as he stared wondrously through his bedroom window, it was as it was that October eve exactly a year ago. It was a very dark and stormy night all right. Daddy's instruments showed it. Barometric pressure falling, dewpoint a degree off the current temperature. The wet bulb said it was moist and humid. Daddy had shown Melvyn how to read all the instruments from the time he was three. And they all indicated the weather was going to get worse. Just like that night.

As Melvyn stared like a frightened child out his window through panes melted with streaming rivulets of water, the sky was an inverted ocean of low clouds and thunder.



The rain drops splattered against the glass as hard as against a speeding windshield. It was like that night daddy left him, and it was growing more intense even as his mind floated back to the horror.

“Are you gonna sit there all night?”

Chuck’s cigarette-scarred, slurred voice thundered from the hallway. It would have startled anyone else. But Melvyn was used to it. He sensed Chuck’s presence in his doorway even before he heard him. The distinctive odor emanating from the bottle of George Dickel Tennessee whiskey warned him Chuck was there before he heard him speak. Melvyn continued to watch the storm. He heard the whistle of the gale wind blowing through the branches of the pecan tree just outside his window. Occasionally, one of the branches would bend under the severe gusts and scratch against the glass inches from his eyes.

“Why don’t ya go outside and get some fresh air? Stop staring out that goddamn window and looking at those stupid broke dials. It’s a beautiful night, Moron. But not to you, ain’t that right?”

The sarcasm dripped from Chuck’s voice like the whiskey from the tilted bottle in his hand.

Melvyn replied, to himself mostly, “Daddy’s instruments say it’s getting worse.” Melvyn knew this was going to set Chuck off.

Maybe that’s why he said it.

“The hell with those instruments! They stopped working a year ago! Look outside, goddamn it! Look outside, Retard!”

Melvyn blinked at another flash of lightning. One thousand one, one thousand

two . . . BOOM. Less than a mile away.

“Just stormin’ away, right?” Chuck began to sway down the hallway toward the kitchen and his other bottle of Dickel. “You’re gonna have to get over Daddy sooner or later. He ain’t comin’ back. Can’t pretend to watch storms for the rest of yer life, ya know. Moron.” Chuck’s drunken voice was barely audible as he stumbled farther down the hall.

“He ain’t comin’ back, Moron!” Chuck screamed from the kitchen as he poured another tumbler of Dickel.

“It’s you and me.”

Melvyn silently watched the light show through the glass.

“Get in here and fix me somethin’ to eat!”

Another flash, followed immediately by the glass-rattling boom. Melvyn winced. Close! He didn’t even have a chance to say the first one thousand. He should be used to it by now. He’d heard the same crashing thunder every night since Daddy left. One of the first things Daddy had taught him about the weather was how to count one thousand one, one thousand two. It was science, his dad reminded. But to Melvyn it was magic.

He looked out at the phantom storm, eyes wide open like a frightened puppy’s, waiting for its dead master to come home.

Chuck appeared in Melvyn’s doorway, his silhouette like one of those black, faceless forms on the paper targets he and Daddy shot at Gabe’s Gun Range. They used to go every Saturday. And now there was Chuck. A burly oaf, hands down by his sides, head

bent, unkempt hair blocking the overhead light in the hallway. The silhouette made Melvyn smile.

“Go get me something to eat, Fartface or I’m gonna beat ya with this bottle.” Melvyn knew Chuck wasn’t threatening him. It was a promise, as Chuck liked to remind him. Chuck had done it before. The worst time was that night. He beat Melvyn bad and then he went after Daddy. Daddy couldn’t call the cops. The lines were down because of the storm and Daddy ran out in the sheets of rain and thunder to get into the pickup and spin away before Chuck stumbled off the porch and fell face first into a blood-red puddle of rainwater and rust colored clay. That was the last time either of them saw Daddy.

Melvyn looked at the silhouette and softly said, “It’s rainin’ too hard.” Chuck reached Melvyn at his window perch in barely two strides. He grabbed him by the back of his hair and threw him down on the dirty bedroom carpet and pressed his work boot caked with dried red mud squarely on Melvyn’s chest.

“Cut this shit out about rain. You hear me? Daddy ain’t coming back. He’s dead. Get over it! Now, do what I say, get in that goddamn truck and go get my supper. Or there’s gonna be a second goddamn funeral I’ll have to go to, you little prick.”

Melvyn stared straight into Chuck’s clouded, drunken eyes.

“The road’s washed out.”

Chuck’s eyes darkened. Darker than the black clouds above the pecan tree outside the window. Like an explosion of lightning,

he swung his arm across Melvyn’s desk. The instruments flew across the room and crashed into the opposite wall. Dial faces shattered. Tubes snapped. Indicator needles froze where they were, stuck on signs of worsening weather.

“Storm’s here.” Melvyn smiled.

Chuck swung the half empty Dickel bottle across the side of Melvyn’s head. The fact it didn’t break infuriated him. He swung again. Melvyn saw a white flash and felt a boom of thunder. The world rumbled into darkness and silence.

The bottle still didn’t break. But the blank, unfocussed stare from Melvyn’s eyes stopped Chuck from swinging again.

“Fuck it. I’ll get my own supper. Little prick. Where’re the keys.”

Chuck wobbled out of the room and down the hallway to the front door. He stumbled out on the porch into the crisp night air.

Crickets chirped, the shaved fields around the house an indigo blue from the blaze of stars above him, like the ceiling of the College Planetarium. Where Daddy had taken Melvyn and Chuck ages before, when they were a family, when they were still real brothers.

Chuck jumped into the pickup, dropped the keys, cursed, snatched them off the littered floor and shoved them into the ignition. The engine roared, the dog growl of its rusted exhaust echoing across the fields, waking the woods. Before the truck had a chance to warm up in the dry chill air, Chuck spun the wheels in reverse and twisted onto the road toward town.

Melvyn stared at the ceiling of his bedroom. But his glazed eyes looked beyond it, into the wet branches of the pecan tree, weeping steady drops around him, on him, onto his face. As he stared at the shining, dripping leaves, one solitary drop fell and landed right between his eyes on the bridge of his nose. Melvyn laughed out loud. The sound of his laugh made him feel like he was eight years old again. The lightning flashed in a steady rhythmic pulse like a strobe light, freezing the drops in mid-air, just above Melvyn's face. He felt warm wetness beneath his head. The branches faded away but the rain continued. All over Melvyn, down the hallway, out the screen door Chuck had left open, across the porch and into the yard, streams slicing through the red North Florida mud. Melvyn saw it all; saw it washing out the one lane road from their house, swirling around the timber legs of the old bridge where daddy had died the October before.

Chuck sped toward the bridge, steering the truck's wheels through the powdery red dirt and onto the wooden planks. Something wasn't right. Maybe it was a pothole. Maybe a loose log. Or maybe it was the teasing laughter of an eight year old boy enjoying the rain, distracting a brother drunk on Dickel, staring uselessly through a wiper-smearred windshield.

They found the truck the next day upside down in the dry arroyo that channeled nothing but tinder twigs and desiccated leaves this time of year. Chuck's neck was broken. He had obviously been drinking, the sheriff noted. The broken bottle of Dickel had flown like a missile out of the passenger window and shattered against a tree. There was nothing left but glass and label. The remaining dregs of whiskey had long evaporated in the dry morning air when they dragged him unceremoniously out.

Recognizing the truck and Chuck, the sheriff and emergency crew followed the road back up to the quiet, empty house. And that's where they found Melvyn. Soaked wet, his head resting in a pool of sticky blood. A smile on his face like he'd been enjoying the most beatific sight. They carefully covered his damp body with a sheet and carried him out to the waiting ambulance. A few neighbors and hands witnessed the quiet procession underneath an early morning sun.

As the ambulance pulled away, the driver peered through the dust-powdered windshield up toward the cloudless blue sky.

"Beautiful day."

"Yep", his partner replied. "Shore is."



END TRANSMISSION